

**NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection  
Division of Fish and Wildlife**

**Trout Fishing Facts and Information**

**Lake Trout**

The lake trout is a popular gamefish and the largest salmonid species present in New Jersey. The lake trout is distributed across Canada, southward in coldwaters of the United States, notably in New England, the Finger Lakes region, the Great Lakes, and scattered western lakes where it has been introduced. It almost always inhabits deep, clear lakes, although stream-dwelling populations sometimes occur where the rivers are connected to lakes. Introduced into Round Valley Reservoir in 1977, the reservoir currently supports a naturally reproducing lake trout population and may represent the most southern range for this species in the United States. An excellent food fish, the lake trout once constituted a large commercial fishery in the Great Lakes until pollution, the parasitic sea lamprey and overfishing decimated these fisheries.

**Where to Find Them**

Good lake trout fisheries have been established at Round Valley Reservoir and Merrill Creek Reservoir through the Division's stocking efforts. As previously mentioned, lake trout generally inhabit deep water areas and relate to the bottom although they will make use of the entire water column provided temperatures and oxygen levels are sufficient. In these two reservoirs, lake trout are commonly targeted in water depths of 40 to 120 feet.

**When to Fish for Them**

Lake trout can be caught throughout the year even through the ice, although ice fishing opportunities at Round Valley Reservoir are limited since safe ice conditions occur very infrequently and at Merrill Creek Reservoir ice fishing is prohibited. Spring through the fall is the most popular time period as weather conditions are more accommodating for venturing out of these large waterbodies. Lake trout can be caught throughout the day with the typical morning and late afternoon periods considered to be more productive.

**How to Catch Them**

One of the most simple ways to fish for lake trout from a boat is to anchor or slowly drift using a slip egg sinker and a hook baited with live herring positioned a foot or two off the bottom. Don't discard any herring that may die in the bait bucket because lake trout aren't particular and will readily bite on dead herring. This simple method can be very effective and many anglers have run out of bait on Merrill Creek Reservoir due to fast and furious action. Another more sophisticated method is to use electronics (fish finders) to search and locate fish and vertically jig, using bucktail jigs or metal such as Hopkins, Kastmaster and the Crippled Herring. Downrigger trolling, using spoons, is also a very popular method. Lakers are occasionally caught from shore in the early spring when water temperatures are still cold and fish are cruising shallower areas. Casting spoons will work in this situation.

**Links to Sportsmen's Organizations**

Round Valley Reservoir: Round Valley Trout Association (R.V.T.A.) [www.fishingrvta.com](http://www.fishingrvta.com)

## **Rainbow, Brown and Brook Trout**

### **General Facts**

The brook trout is native to northeastern North America from Georgia to the Arctic Circle and it is the only salmonid (trout) species native to New Jersey and designated the state fish. It requires the coldest water temperatures of these trout species. It's tolerance to both acid and alkaline waters is also greater. In rivers having a mixed-trout population the brookie is most often found in the headwater section and around cold tributary streams. There are approximately 123 streams containing naturally reproducing brook trout populations in New Jersey.

The brown trout is native to Europe and has been widely introduced in North America beginning in 1883. It is slightly less tolerant of warm water than the rainbow trout but appears to be more tolerant of habitat degradation and change. It normally occupies the downstream section of streams with mixed-trout populations. There are approximately 79 streams containing naturally reproducing brown trout populations in New Jersey. The brown trout generally grows larger than the rainbow or brookie reaching upwards of 40 pounds.

The rainbow trout is native to the North American Pacific drainage from Northwestern Mexico to Kushowin River in Alaska. This popular gamefish has been widely introduced throughout the world. The migrating rainbow, whether anadromous or lake type, is known as a steelhead. The number of naturally reproducing populations within the state are minimal with only 18 streams documented.

In addition to naturally occurring trout populations, the Division of Fish and Wildlife distributes over 770,000 brook, brown and rainbow trout into over 200 waterbodies across the state, each year. Our trout stocking program is by far our most popular program providing trout fishing opportunities for tens of thousands of anglers in the state. These opportunities vary from small urban park ponds, to large lakes and rivers and crystal clear mountain streams. Stocked trout are normally cooperative and relatively easy to catch. Trout fishing can be equally enjoyable for kids and grown-ups and novice and avid anglers alike. Trout are a favorite of anglers who enjoy eating a portion of their catch.

### **Where to Find Them**

Trout fishing opportunities can be found in every county of the state. Lakes and ponds provide the majority of fishing opportunities in the southern half of the state whereas north and central Jersey contain most of the traditional trout streams and native trout populations. Opportunities to catch large trout are available at the designated "trophy and holdover trout lakes".

### **When to Fish for Them**

The traditional opening of the trout fishing season normally starts on the second Saturday in April, however, trout fishing opportunities are available the year round. Spring is the most popular time especially during the trout stocking period. Trout fishing activities wane somewhat during the summer with trout maintenance and trout production streams and "trophy and holdover trout lakes" providing the bulk of the opportunities. Trout fishing activity picks up in the fall as stream waters cool and our fall stocking replenishes selected streams in the north and lakes in south Jersey. Winter trout fishing is also becoming more popular and our winter trout stocked lakes program is providing additional opportunities. This program has also sparked a renewed interest in ice fishing for trout.

A relatively unique and popular shoreline fishery takes place at Round Valley Reservoir and to a lesser extent at Merrill Creek Reservoir in the fall and spring. In the fall large rainbow trout move into the shallows cruising the shoreline. A lesser movement of brown trout follows a few weeks later. This

fishery peaks around the last week of October. A similar scene plays out again in the spring. Beautifully colored rainbow trout weighing up to five pounds are routinely caught during these periods.

## **How to Catch Them**

### **Streams:**

There are several common methods and gear types used to fish for trout in streams. Fishing with spinning outfits and fly rods are the most popular. A large portion of trout anglers use spinning gear with either bait or lures. The most common bait fishing rig is a number 8 or 10 hook tied to 4 lb. test line with a split shot attached approximately 12 inches above the hook. Favorite baits include garden worms, night crawlers, meal worms, corn, fathead minnows, powerbait and salmon eggs. Usually the bait is cast in a slight upstream direction and allowed to drift and bounce along the bottom. Lures are very effective on trout especially when the waters begin to warm and they can cover a large area of the stream in a short time triggering aggressive fish. The size, color and style of trout lures are almost endless. The most popular are small spinners such as Mepps, Roostertail, Panther Martin and spoons such as Pheobe.

Fly fishing for trout is one of the oldest and perhaps most artistic forms of sport fishing. Learning to fly cast effectively may take a little more practice and coordination but it is a very effective and a rewarding style of fishing. It is also very challenging to try and “match the hatch” that is, to present a similar looking fly that imitates the insect form that the trout are currently feeding on.

### **Lakes:**

Fishing for stocked trout in lakes or ponds from a boat or shore usually involves the use of bait or lures. Boat anglers generally troll trout spoons and small crank baits or use live bait. Bait anglers generally anchor or drift using a sliding egg sinker or bobber with a number 6 or 8 baitholder hook. The bait is suspended and fished at depths of generally between 5 and 30 feet below the surface. An electronic fish finder is very helpful in determining the preferred depths of suspended trout. Favorite baits include night crawlers, fathead minnows, shiners and herring. Shore anglers generally cast small spinners or spoons similar to those used in streams. They also use bait fished on the bottom with a sliding egg sinker or split shot for weight. Bobbers are also used to present suspended bait. Favorite baits for the shore angler are garden worms, night crawlers, fathead minnows, shiners, meal worms, powerbait, corn and small marshmallows.

Anglers seeking large holdover trout generally fish from a boat. Techniques include trolling lures and drifting bait. Two types of trolling are employed; flatline and downrigger. In flatline trolling little or no weight is used in conjunction with the lure. It is used most often early and late in the season when water temperatures are suitable for trout near the surface. For more precise depth control and to troll at much greater depths downriggers are the technique of choice. In summer when the trout are deep, downrigger trolling is essential to success. Spoons, e.g. Luhr Jensen's Needle Fish, Sutton, and minnow style crankbaits, e.g. Storm's Thunder Stick, floating Rapalas and Yo-Zuri's Crystal Minnow, are popular trolling lures.

Bait anglers generally drift with a slider egg sinker rig. This rig consists of a size 6 or 4 thin wire style hook with a 24 inch or more leader tied to a barrel swivel with the sinker placed above the swivel. Herring is the bait of choice but shiners are also effective and a good substitute when herring are not available. An electronic fish finder is invaluable when fishing for trout in deep lakes and reservoirs.

## **Links to Sportmen's Organizations**

Round Valley Reservoir: Round Valley Trout Association (R.V.T.A) [www.fishingrvta.com](http://www.fishingrvta.com)

Trout Unlimited Chapters:

Central Jersey – [www.cjtu.org](http://www.cjtu.org)

East Jersey – [www.eastjerseytu.org](http://www.eastjerseytu.org)

Ernest Schwiebert – [www.esctu.org](http://www.esctu.org)

Hacklebarney – [www.hacklebarneytu.org](http://www.hacklebarneytu.org)

Jersey Shore – [www.jstu.org](http://www.jstu.org)

North Jersey – [www.northjerseytu.homestead.com](http://www.northjerseytu.homestead.com)